



TOWN OF NORTON
SELECT BOARD
MUNICIPAL CENTER
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Select Board
Meeting Minutes
April 6, 2023

I. **Call to Order by Chair**

The April 6, 2023 meeting of the Norton Select Board was held at the Norton Media Center, 184 West Main Street, Norton, MA 02766 as well as remotely (Web: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83225589285>; Phone: 646-558 8656; Webinar ID: 832 2558 9285), and was called to order at 7:01 P.M., by Ms. Megan Artz, Chair. Member(s) present: Mr. Kevin Snyder, Mr. Michael Toole, Mr. Steven Hornsby, and Mr. Alec Rich, III. Also in attendance: Mr. Michael D. Yunits, Town Manager.

II. **New Business**

Discussion and/or Vote to Award the Contract to M. O'Connor Contracting for the New Town Hall Project

Mr. Yunits advised that of the bids that came in, M. O'Connor Contracting was the lowest bidder at \$16,797,800 (for the base bid) and the base bid with the alternates came in at \$16,992,800, which was approximately \$2,000,000 below budget. Mr. Toole asked what was eliminated from the project in order to come in where they are for the bid. Mr. Slattery provided a summary of the changes to make the project come in cheaper, such as eliminating the dormers on the second floor and changing the exterior siding from brick to cement clapboard.

Mr. Snyder asked what was happening with the current Town Hall building because that seems to be a big question that comes up. Mr. Slattery stated that they were originally going to take it down, but to save \$850,000 they are leaving it and a portion of the building (middle hallway over) will be for the Fire Department's expansion. Mr. Slattery noted that the garage where the Cupboard of Kindness operates out of will be knocked down. Mr. Yunits noted that the base bid is \$2,071,984 under the estimate and with the alternates it is \$1,876,984 under the estimate.

MOTION was made by Mr. Toole to approve the bid for the New Town Hall with M. O'Connor and authorize the Town Manager to sign the contract. Seconded by Mr. Snyder. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.

Mr. Slattery noted that at one of the Permanent Building Committee's recent meetings they voted to keep him as the Chair, Mr. Brian Bechet as the Vice Chair, and the Clerk remained the same (Mr. Mark Gersham).

Review of the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget with the Town Manager Recommendations (Including Capital Recommendations).

Mr. Toole asked Mr. Yunits before he began his presentation where he was in the budget process. Mr. Yunits answered that right now he has made recommendations for the budget and the Town is still short \$130,181 but this can probably be made up by free cash. The Town Manager advised that he is waiting to see some of the Special Town Meeting articles come in to see how much

money is going to be spent out of those to see if they will have money available. Mr. Yunits noted that the general government request was \$15,350,466 and the School Department's request was \$36,364,830 which created a deficit of \$4,578,170; he pointed out that they only had \$2,000,000 to start with. The Town Manager informed the Board that they plan to use \$1,000,000 of free cash and may have to add that \$130,000. Mr. Yunits reminded the Board that at their joint meeting on the TRANE project with the School Committee and Finance Committee, the School Committee indicated that there was \$300,000 in rebates coming in, so those funds can go back into [the budget] to replenish some of that free cash when they come in. Mr. Toole asked the Town Manager what the increase in State funding was for this year, and Mr. Yunits answered it was a little over \$90,000 net for the entire budget. Mr. Yunits emphasized that it is tough when the State only gives the Town a 2% increase and a lot of communities were getting a significant increase in Chapter 70 money, but because Norton is considered a town that can afford to pay (and there are only 119 towns/cities in the State) they won't be seeing a big increase unfortunately. The Town Manager advised that in order to balance the budget, the general government recommended budget is \$14,599,141 and the School Department's recommended budget is \$33,998,943; so, the general government increase is approximately 1.6% and the School Department 2.0%. Mr. Yunits noted that the payment to TRANE is really affecting their ability to create a balanced FY24 budget.

Mr. Yunits referred to the Fixed and Shared Expenses and stated that it has gone up from \$16,984,643 to \$18,789,958 for this upcoming fiscal year's budget. He pointed out that the main driver of that is \$1,050,000 payment to fund the TRANE project. Mr. Toole stated that without the TRANE payment, the increase would have come in around 3.0%, which Mr. Yunits replied was correct and the goal. Mr. Yunits advised that without the TRANE payment, it would have been a \$430,815 increase for the Town and just under \$1,000,000 for the School Department. Mr. Yunits noted that the general government side is only increasing from \$14,365,002 to \$14,599,141 and the School Department is only going from the \$33,330,297 to \$33,998,943. Ms. Artz expressed that considering what they are up against, the proposed budget increases are good and Mr. Toole agreed. Mr. Yunits stated that he didn't want to be a "fear monger" but noted that the Town has been very fortunate this year; no snow this year (so leftover funds can go towards free cash) and the health insurance only went up 1% (he noted that every 1% increase is equivalent to around \$700,000). Mr. Yunits did express a concern with the Community Electricity Aggregation Program contract ending in the middle of the next fiscal year because it was a 5-year contract and he is unsure of what the rate is going to increase to.

Mr. Yunits reported that he had spoken with the Council on Aging (COA) Director and expressed that he knows they really need help over there, so they are going to use ARPA money again this year and, in the Fall, they will look at this again to add an employee. He noted that they did add an 18-hour per week van driver position to the COA's budget and funded the counselor at 18 hours and the Outreach Counselor is funded 50% out of the COA's budget and 50% out of ARPA.

Mr. Yunits provided a summary of budget cuts per department to give the Select Board a comparison of FY24 to FY23. During this review, Mr. Yunits mentioned a \$2,365,880 cut to the School Department's requested budget and Ms. Artz questioned what the bulk of that came from. Mr. Yunits answered that they don't do the cut line by line it is just to their overall budget. Mr. Toole clarified that the Fixed and Shared Expenses comes off the top, which Mr. Yunits confirmed was correct. Mr. Toole asked if any of the regional schools fall within that, which Mr. Yunits answered they do not. Mr. Yunits informed the Board that Southeastern Regional is \$1,717,885 and that is up from \$1,582,609 and right now Bristol Agricultural is \$116,000.

Mr. Toole asked what were some things that the Town Manager wanted to do for the budget that they didn't get to do, which Mr. Yunits replied with the following:

- Human Resources Consultant (dropped \$10,000)
- Human Services employee at the COA
- Fire Department would like to add another person

Mr. Toole inquired about the Chartley Fire Station staying open. Mr. Yunits explained that if they can't fund the overtime (noting that the Fire Department is also losing 2 guys this year), then they will have to close it. Mr. Yunits mentioned the effects from Brockton Hospital being closed and the community hospitals being in the "red" and emphasized it is getting tough out there. Mr. Yunits said in speaking to the future, they will have the space and they really need an HR person and an IT/Communications person. Mr. Toole said he would love to see the Town Manager's Office do the same as the Superintendent's Office where they do weekly updates.

Mr. Yunits discussed that they did their Capital Recommendations and gave a brief summary to the Board. He noted that they didn't do the mini-splits for the Police Department and they also didn't have to pay for radios because those are getting paid for through SEMRECC. Mr. Yunits pointed out that they were able to fund a new permitting system. He mentioned that the Conservation, Board of Health, and Inspections Departments weren't able to get the new vehicles they requested.

Review and/or Vote on Town Meeting Articles.

Mr. Yunits provided an overview of the Town Meeting articles as follows:

Article 2: Chapter 90 Fund (Finance Committee voted to recommend) has been going down the past few years and has been level funded for years. He noted that the MMA (Massachusetts Municipal Association) is trying to change that because it is not keeping up with inflation.

MOTION was made by Mr. Toole to approve Chapter 90 Transportation Aid Program. Seconded by Mr. Hornsby. Vote: Unanimous. Motion CARRIES.

Article 3: recommended by the Finance Committee and is for tree services.

MOTION was made by Mr. Toole to approve \$31,000 for proposed tree services. Seconded by Mr. Hornsby. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.

Article 4: Collective Bargaining Agreements.

Article 5: Water Enterprise Budget.

Article 6: Sewer Enterprise Budget.

Mr. Snyder noted that both the Water and Sewer Enterprise budgets were pretty flat.

Article 7: FY24 Operating Budget.

Article 8: Capital Improvements Appropriation. Mr. Yunits advised the Board that they are not recommending to put money into that and they will look at this again in the Fall.

Article 9: Capital Plan.

Article 10: Water Tank Aeration System

Article 11: Well 4 Replacement Project. Recommended by the Finance Committee.

Article 12: Mr. Yunits explained that the Select Board would have to agree to put it on the warrant and that this would be to amend all town buildings to be exempt from tie-in fees for water/sewer projects. Mr. Hornsby stated that this seems like a “no-brainer” and expressed that they should vote on it now and Ms. Artz agreed.

MOTION was made by Mr. Hornsby to accept Article 12 as written. Seconded by Mr. Toole. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.

Article 13: Creation of Special Education Stabilization Funds.

Mr. Yunits informed the Board that this is on the warrant as a placeholder right now. Mr. Toole expressed that having two Stabilization Funds seems redundant and unnecessary. Mr. Snyder asked if they had ever used Stabilization Funds for the School Department before, which Mr. Yunits stated they did for the first year of COVID.

Article 14: Collection and Disposal of Discarded Items Abandoned Along Roadways and Throughout Town that Require Special Handling.

Article 15: WPAT

Article 16: Placeholder: Bylaw Amendment – Personnel Bylaws.

Mr. Yunits stated that this is on the warrant as placeholder. Mr. Toole asked if he saw any changes to the Personnel Bylaws and Mr. Yunits mentioned just possibly the COA additional staff in the Fall.

Article 17: Zoning Amendment: Chapter 175, Article XIII – Floodplain District.

He advised that they are still waiting to hear non-binding recommendations from the Planning Board.

Article 18: Zoning Amendment: Chapter 175, Article XXII – Solar Photovoltaic Installations.

He advised that they are still waiting to hear non-binding recommendations from the Planning Board.

Mr. Yunits stated that he recommended taking no action on Article 19: OPEB

MOTION was made by Mr. Snyder to take no action on Article 19. Seconded by Mr. Hornsby. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.

Mr. Yunits stated that he also recommended taking no action on Article 20: Stabilization Fund.

MOTION was made by Mr. Snyder to take no action on Article 20. Seconded by Mr. Hornsby. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.

Mr. Yunits and the Board moved on to discuss the Special Town Meeting articles as follows:

Article 1: Prior Year Bills.

Article 2: Separation Expenses.

Mr. Yunits advised the Board that the Town Accountant, Mr. James Puello, has proposed the idea of setting up a Separation Expenses account.

Article 3: FY23 Operating Budget Supplements.

Article 4: FY23 Water Enterprise Operating Budget Supplements.

Article 5: FY23 Sewer Enterprise Operating Budget Supplements.

Mr. Yunits noted that he doesn't believe they are going to need to fund Articles 4 and 5.

Article 6: FY23 Capital Improvements Fund Appropriations.

Article 7: FY23 Capital Improvements Plan Amendment.

Article 8: Traffic Signal Replacement – Norton Fire Department.

Mr. Yunits advised that the Town has received almost \$50,000 in insurance money in result of a storm from 2020 where the traffic light in front of the Fire Department came down. He explained that because they had the project going on with the State, they had to go through them and their contractor. Mr. Yunits informed the Board that they finally got a price to do the repairs and sent the letter to the insurance company to get a supplement because it is \$84,000 to do the work.

Article 9: Water Main Upgrades – Stephen Street and Peter Street. This article was recommended by the Capital Improvements Committee. Mr. Yunits explained that they have got old concrete asbestos lined pipe on these streets, so they are looking to upgrade that.

Article 10: Engineering Study – Norton Center.

Mr. Yunits stated that this is the request from the Traffic Safety Committee for the Town to appropriate funds to hire an engineer to look at the intersection at the center of town.

Article 11 is for any additional funds the Town may need for engineering work for the Bike Trail Project.

Article 12 is for the replacement of the Town Gazebo, which the Town is also looking for a supplement from the insurance company. Mr. Yunits recognized the great work Mr. Robert Kimball, Jr., Mr. Keith Silver, and Mr. Nicholas Iafrate have done reaching out to different companies for the replacement of the gazebo. He stated that the cost came in around \$21,000 and they have insurance money for that, but the project also needs electrical and concrete work done.

III. **Open session for topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance**

Not applicable.

IV. **Executive Session.**

To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining, i.e., SENA-B (Local Union 9517, Unit 14), pursuant to G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(3).

To discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto, pursuant to G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(4).

V. Adjournment.

DECLARATION BY THE CHAIR:

Ms. Artz declared, under General Laws Chapter 30A, §21(a)(3) and §21(a)(4), that the purposes of the executive session will be to discuss collective bargaining, i.e. SENA-B (Local Union 9517, Unit 14), and to discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto, because a discussion in open session pertaining to the above-mentioned matters could compromise the purposes of the executive session and with the Board to not return to open session at the conclusion of the executive session.

MOTION was made by Mr. Snyder at 8:14 P.M. to go into executive session under G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(3) and §21(a)(4) for the purposes and reasons declared by the Chair and with the Board to not return to open session thereafter. Seconded by Mr. Toole. Vote: Mr. Rich – Yes; Mr. Toole – Yes; Mr. Hornsby – Yes; Mr. Snyder – Yes; and Ms. Artz – Yes. MOTION CARRIES.

URL Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoFqeCiU_Tg

Respectfully Submitted by:



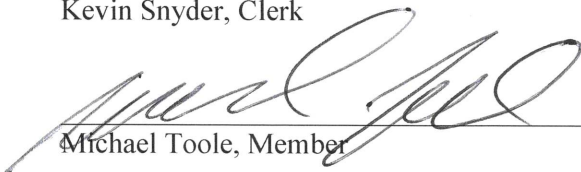
Jennifer Reid, Office Administrator

**SELECT BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
APRIL 6, 2023**



Megan Artz, Chair

Kevin Snyder, Clerk



Michael Toole, Member



Steven Hornsby, Member

Alec Rich, III, Member

Minutes Approved by Board on: April 13, 2023